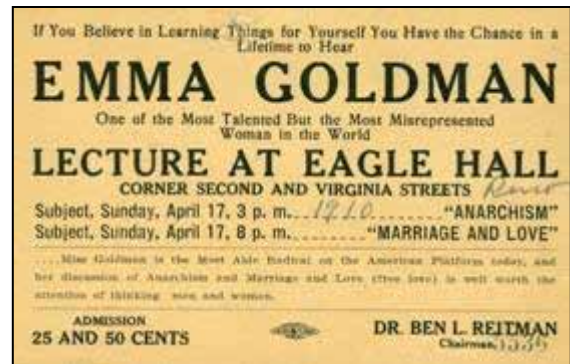


Director Clint Eastwood's recently-released movie, *J. Edgar*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as longtime FBI head J. Edgar Hoover, features anarchist Emma Goldman early in the film.

Labeled by Hoover in 1919 as "one of the most dangerous women in American," Goldman had lectured in Reno in 1910. She arrived with her manager and companion, Dr. Ben Reitman, by train from Salt Lake City on April 15. Reitman, characterized by his biographer as Chicago's "celebrated social reformer, hobo king, and whorehouse physician," scheduled two presentations at the downtown Eagle Hall conspicuously on Sunday--the Christian Sabbath--April 17.



Goldman, who immigrated to the United States from Russia in 1885 at the age of sixteen, and was inspired by the Haymarket Square Riot in Chicago the following year to embrace anarchism, first met the colorful and controversial Dr. Reitman in the "Windy City" in 1908. They fell in love, he joined the anarchist ranks, and they began touring the country together. It was during their 1910 tour that the couple decided Reno needed to hear her messages on "Anarchism" and "Marriage and Love." The *Nevada State Journal* quoted Reitman as saying that normally Goldman did not speak in cities of less than 50,000, "and therefore Reno should be very proud of her presence in its midst." The principal reason for the brief stop in Reno on the way to speaking engagements in San Francisco appears to have been Goldman's interest in the newly-acclaimed divorce capital of the nation.

"Reno is proof of my contention that marriage is a failure," the firebrand feminist told a local reporter. "At my lecture, I will invite any divorcees present to get up and tell me why they are here, and to state whether they believe my ideas are right or wrong. Nevada is in an advanced state. Its divorce laws stamp it as a modern, free thinking community."

As the so-called high priestess of anarchy, Goldman had no use for women's suffrage. Nevada women were diligently pursuing the right to vote when Goldman arrived on the scene. However, she had visited the states of Wyoming and Colorado where woman had been voting for many years and saw no evidence that their subordinate position in society had changed. "Why waste time with suffrage," Goldman proclaimed, "when the same can be gained so much easier in a sociological way?"

The *Nevada State Journal* countered in an April 16 editorial that "The people of Nevada are not inclined to the principles of anarchism. They will listen out of curiosity to Emma Goldman's talk, but they will not forsake their adherence to the principles of democracy."

The 8 p.m. talk on "Marriage and Love" drew a large crowd. "Goldman Talks on Free Love" read the front page *Journal* headline. The accompanying story noted that the diminutive "Miss Goldman's radical views were very radical. . . . She quite took the breath away from many, who gasped continually" Goldman argued that women who came to Reno for divorces, only to marry again, were not free. Marriage was an economic agreement. "A husband isn't a woman's friend or comrade," she declared, "he is her keeper." Goldman referenced Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *Doll House* and *Ghosts* numerous times in her scathing criticism of the institution of marriage and patriarchal family dynamics.

Goldman concluded her talk by condemning all the female prostitution in Reno, calling it "white slavery," and claiming 75% of the men patronizing prostitutes were married.

"All in all the lecture was convincing, and those who listened seemed to enjoy the experience," the *Journal* reporter wrote. "No policemen were present, which is somewhat strange for a Goldman lecture, nevertheless it was successful."

Myth #135: When Emma Goldman Came to Reno by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

As a result of Hoover's efforts, the federal government deported Goldman to Russia in 1919, invoking the wartime Anarchist Exclusion Act. While Goldman had initially supported the Bolshevik Revolution two years earlier as the coming of the new world order, she quickly became disillusioned with Vladimir Lenin's Soviet dictatorship of the proletariat. Goldman died on May 14, 1940 in Toronto. Her body was transported to Chicago and buried in nearby Forest Park's Waldheim (now Home Park) Cemetery, close to the 1893 Haymarket Martyrs' Monument. Ben Reitman, who died in 1942, is buried nearby.

In an August 11, 2008 visit to the cemetery, I was surprised to find that Goldman's gravestone has her death in 1939. She probably wouldn't have cared about the erroneous date and approved the circle-A anarchist symbol more recently painted on the marker.

Credit: Photograph of Emma Goldman lecture card courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*; the *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley; *Humboldt Sun*; *Battle Mountain Bugle*; *Lovelock Review-Miner*, and *Nevada Observer* (online version).